'Never a Lie'

By Art Buchwald

A 10-year-old boy named Virgil has just written me a letter.

He says, "Dear Sir, I notice in the newspapers that several Justice Department attorneys have testified in the ITT case. Sometimes one Justice attorney says one thing and then another Justice attorney says another. Suppose they're lying? Who prosecutes the prosecutors?"

Dear Virgil,

Yours is a very impertinent question which really doesn't deserve an answer. To assume that someone in the Justice Department would tell an untruth makes you no better than a Berrigan brother.

A Justice Department attorney takes an oath that he will never tell a lie—on a Bible. This Bible belongs to the Attorney General, who has taken an oath on a Bible that belongs to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, who has taken an oath on a Bible that belongs to the President of the United States. You can readily see the trouble a Justice Department attorney would be in if he perjured himself on that many Bibles.

What you are confusing is perjury and loss of memory. Several of the Justice Department attorneys have suffered from an inability to remember facts pertinent to the ITT investigation. This is understandable when you realize that most Justice Department attorneys are trained to ask questions, but are very rarely called upon to answer them.

If you spent all your life saying, "Where were you on the night of Feb. 12, 1961?" you would be in a heck of a jam if someone suddenly asked *you* that question.

It is for this reason that under our system Justice Department attorneys in congressional hearings are permitted to "correct" their testimony and "refresh" their memories.

The fact that a Justice Department attorney says one thing in the morning does not preclude him from saying the opposite in the afternoon. And just because one Justice Department attorney says one thing and another Justice Department attorney says another thing does not mean either one of them is lying. It just means they're getting at the truth from opposite directions.

Let me give you an example. Justice Department attorney, Wishbone tells a Senate committee that he's never talked to anyone in the Zig Zag Monopoly Company. He goes home that night and his wife reminds him that his brother-in-law is president of the Zig Zag Monopoly Company. So he goes back to the committee and says he's just remembered that his brother-in-law is president of the company, but he hasn't seen him in 10 years.

Then he takes a recess break and his secretary tells him he's had 20 meetings with his brother-in-law in the past three months.

So he goes back to the committee and says he would like to correct the record; he did see his brother-in-law, but they never really talked *business*. That night his brother-in-law calls him and says he's in trouble with the IRS because he's put Wishbone down for 20 business lunches.

So Wishbone goes back to the committee the next day and says he talked business with his brother-in-law, but he did nothing to affect Zig Zag Monopoly Company's case.

That, Virgil, is not called perjury—it's called amnesia.

I can assure you that your question about who prosecutes the prosecutors has no validity in Washington. There is no reason to prosecute anyone in the ITT case because everyone is telling the truth, and if you keep writing troublemaking letters like this, I won't be surprised if, when you grow a little older, someone down here doesn't start tapping your phone.

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Post 4/10/72

Capitol Punishment

Editors Meeting

The American Society of Newspaper Editors yesterday heard views on publishing government documents. Secretary of the Treasury John B. Connally Jr. also told the editors that criticism of all institutions is creating a "growing lack of confidence" that could lead to a dictatorship. *See stories, Page C3.*